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United Nations A/65/909

General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 August 2011

Original: English

Sixty-fifth session
Agenda item 118
Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 64/301, the General Assembly decided to establish, at its sixty-fifth session, an ad hoc working group on the revitalization of the General Assembly, open to all Member States:

(a) To identify further ways to enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the Assembly, inter alia, by building on previous resolutions and evaluating the status of their implementation;

(b) To submit a report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-fifth session.

2. The present report and the recommendations contained herein are submitted pursuant to that resolution.

3. During the sixty-fifth session of the Assembly, on 19 November 2010, the President of the General Assembly appointed two Co-Chairs of the Working Group, Mr. Dalius Čekuolis, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, and Mr. Camillo Gonsalves, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations.

4. Before the formal beginning of its work, the Co-Chairs of the Working Group conducted informal meetings with various Member States and representatives of a variety of political groups. During those meetings, the Co-Chairs benefited extensively from the insights and ideas of Member States on both the substance and the technical and procedural aspects of the revitalization process.

II. Proceedings

5. The Working Group held six meetings, on 14 March, 13 and 28 April, 17 and 25 May and 29 July 2011.

6. The programme of work was organized in two practical stages, as follows: (a) general discussion and exchange of views; and (b) thematic meetings. Prior to each of the thematic meetings, the Co-Chairs, to stimulate a comprehensive review of the updated inventory/chart of General Assembly resolutions contained in the annex to the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly (A/63/959), as mandated by paragraph 3 of resolution 64/301, prepared and circulated non-papers on the clusters of thematic issues to be considered. Delegations, expressing their appreciation for this initiative, identified ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly.

A. General discussion

7. At its first meeting, on 14 March, the Working Group held a general discussion on the revitalization of the General Assembly, in the course of which representatives of 17 Member States intervened, including on behalf of various political groups, to convey their general positions and expectations regarding the programme of work of the Working Group at the sixty-fifth session.

8. In their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs thanked their predecessors at the sixty-fourth session for their important work and achievements, and referred to resolution 64/301 as the basis for the Working Group's focus. They indicated that the lessons learned by the Main Committees in considering their programmes of work could inform the work of the Working Group in 2011 and noted that the Secretariat had indicated its readiness to provide briefings on relevant themes, as required.

9. During the discussion, many speakers underlined the importance of making the General Assembly and its work more efficient and effective and broadly agreed that a good starting point would be the implementation of existing resolutions. While a group of Member States argued that revitalization was a political process first and foremost, and that revitalization should concern itself with matters of a substantive nature, others were adamant in their emphasis that this could best be achieved by focusing on the working methods and agenda of the General Assembly. The link was also made between revitalization and the President's thematic priority of strengthening the United Nations role in global governance.

10. In the main, interventions focused on the following areas: working methods; the Assembly's role in the selection of the Secretaries-General; the need for strengthening the Office of the President of the General Assembly and its institutional memory; and the Assembly's relationship with other principal organs. Comments were also made regarding the nature of the comprehensive review mandated by resolution 64/301.

11. With regard to the Assembly's efficiency, some considered that working methods, specifically those of the General Assembly and its Main Committees, including the scheduling of high-level meetings and thematic debates, electronic voting systems and documentation management based on timely translation, should form the main focus of discussions on revitalizing the General Assembly. The need for the timely issuance of Assembly resolutions and meeting records was highlighted in particular.

12. While a group of Member States urged necessary caution with regard to the confidentiality and the integrity of the voting process and reaffirmed the principles of credibility, reliability and confidentiality, a few references were made to the modernization of the voting and balloting system in the Assembly, with some suggesting that a briefing on technical aspects related to the conduct of electronic voting might again prove useful for deliberations on this matter.

13. Concerning the general debate, one speaker remarked that, while it had formerly been the main event of the General Assembly, it appeared to have become but one of many events being held around the same time in September. Some therefore argued that scheduling issues needed to be looked into carefully and that in this regard, the roles of the General Committee and the President of the General Assembly might be further explored. The view was expressed that the Working Group might provide indicative guidance in this regard.

14. While the convening of thematic debates was welcomed, it was also suggested that the holding of too many such debates had the potential to undermine the General Assembly's focus and that the needs and capacities of smaller delegations needed to be borne in mind.

15. Several interventions focused on the rationalization of the agenda, including examining the possibility of the further biennialization and triennialization of items. Many delegations, while agreeing that cutting out superfluous mandates was a sensible proposition, insisted, however, that the concept of a "sunset clause" should not be employed without the prior approval of the General Assembly as well as the consent of the State concerned. Some Member States emphasized that the agenda needed to become more responsive and adaptable in the light of new and rapidly evolving challenges.

16. Balance among the principal organs, in particular with the Security Council, in the light of what many perceived as encroachment on the work of the General Assembly, was an important point that needed to be addressed. A number of speakers argued that that included making the Council more accountable to the Assembly and aligning their work programmes.

17. A group of States highlighted the need for a thorough evaluation of the status of implementation of General Assembly resolutions and a clear identification of the underlying causes behind any lack of implementation. These were of the utmost importance in order to progressively eliminate the constraints which were still preventing the process of revitalizing the General Assembly from fulfilling all of its potential.

18. Many delegations were hopeful that the General Assembly would continue to be actively seized of political matters in the realm of international peace and security. Another delegation underlined the need for a more proactive stance by the Assembly in this regard. It was suggested that the Council submit special reports to the Assembly.

19. While one speaker argued that the relationship between the organs could be balanced by exercising the Assembly's authority to reform the Council, another emphatically argued that the urge to push through institutional reform at any cost should be resisted.

20. The annual report of the Security Council to the General Assembly was cited as one area for possible further consideration, with reference made to, inter alia, resolution 51/241, by which the President of the General Assembly was requested to assess the Assembly's debate on the report. On the other hand, improvements already made were also pointed out, such as briefings organized during the monthly Council presidencies. One delegation underlined that the very relationship between the Assembly and the Council was a fundamental constitutional issue in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

21. Regarding the relationship of the General Assembly with the Economic and Social Council, one delegation was of the view that the Assembly should receive reports on both the annual ministerial review and the development cooperation forum.

22. In the context of the discussions on the relationship between the principal organs, further coordination among their respective Presidents was encouraged.

23. Numerous representatives suggested that the Assembly's role in the selection process of the Secretary-General should be enhanced, and expressed regret that provisions to that effect contained in previous resolutions had not yet been fully implemented. Many delegations considered this to be an important issue on the

agenda of the Working Group. Some focused on those improvements that had already been achieved, by pointing to, inter alia, exchanges in informal settings between candidates and regional groups, and emphasized that the existing procedures should continue to be followed.

24. While focusing on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General, several speakers also touched upon the appointment of senior officials in the Secretariat and the United Nations system more generally, including Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and high-level panels. In this context, reference was made to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Selection and conditions of service of executive heads in the United Nations system organizations" (see A/65/71), which many delegations wanted the Working Group to consider.

25. The strengthening of the Office of the President of the General Assembly was mentioned by a number of speakers as a possible focus of the Working Group, and many Member States looked forward to the President's forthcoming views on strengthening the institutional memory of the Office. Many representatives also deemed it essential to ensure the availability of sufficient and predictable financial and human resources for the Office. A group of countries welcomed the measures already adopted with a view to strengthening the Office. The view was expressed that a particular effort should be devoted to the implementation of resolutions already adopted on this matter.

26. The relationship between the General Assembly and groups outside the United Nations was raised, for the first time in the context of the Ad Hoc Working Group, including in particular the relationship with the Group of 20 (G-20). Some countries expressed the view that the Working Group should discuss issuing guidance on the ways in which designated representatives of the United Nations should interact with the wider membership before and after their encounters with external bodies so that the positions of the Assembly could be properly conveyed.

27. Finally, on the nature of the comprehensive review of the inventory contained in the annex to the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (A/63/959), great importance was attached by many speakers to that exercise. It was argued, for instance, that the review should lead to a follow-up mechanism for assessing the status of implementation of General Assembly resolutions, which, one delegation suggested, could take the form of a special unit within the Secretariat.

28. As a result of the above-mentioned deliberations, the Co-Chairs, in a letter dated 5 April 2011, circulated a workplan proposing four thematic meetings focusing on the issues most frequently cited as most central to the revitalization process of the General Assembly, as follows:

(a) The role and authority of the General Assembly and its relationship to the other principal organs of the Organization and other groups outside the United Nations;

(b) The implementation of General Assembly resolutions and the agenda; the working methods of the General Assembly and operational and technical issues, including information on the General Assembly voting system, in the framework of the capital master plan;

(c) The role and responsibility of the General Assembly in the process of selecting and appointing Secretaries-General of the United Nations and in selecting other executive heads of the United Nations system organizations;

(d) The functions of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, including strengthening its institutional memory, and its relationship with the Secretariat.

B. Thematic meetings

The role and authority of the General Assembly and its relationship to the other principal organs of the Organization and other groups outside the United Nations

29. The first thematic meeting, as indicated in the workplan, was held on 13 April, and was attended by the President of the General Assembly. Seventeen delegations intervened in the discussions, including on behalf of groups.

30. In their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs welcomed the presence of the President of the General Assembly and reiterated that the Ad Hoc Working Group had been tasked by resolution 64/301 with identifying further ways of revitalizing the General Assembly. To this end, the Co-Chairs invited delegations to engage in a vigorous exchange of views, following a statement from the President.

31. In his remarks to the Working Group, the President noted with satisfaction that his vision of a strong General Assembly as the principal forum for global debate was widely shared among the membership, as highlighted by the adoption in December 2010 of resolution 65/94 on the United Nations in global governance. The President considered that increasing the Assembly's visibility was crucial, and supported building bridges with actors outside the United Nations, such as the G-20. On the other hand, effective cooperation between the Assembly and the other principal organs needed to be assured; here the President noted his holding of regular meetings, not only with the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, but also with those of the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. In addition, the President welcomed his close interaction with the Secretary-General and the latter's willingness to periodically brief Member States on recent events, which provided them with an opportunity to express their views on issues normally considered by the Security Council.

32. The President also noted that the agenda of the General Assembly needed to better focus on the most pressing issues of the day, and it was underlined that an overburdened agenda risked hurting the quality of debate in the Assembly. Rationalization of the agenda should therefore be further contemplated, and the Second Committee had provided a good example in this regard. It was important to pay greater attention to follow-up to decisions taken to justify the resources made available to the Organization.

33. In the ensuing debate, many delegations stressed their concern at what they considered to be encroachment by the Security Council on the work of the General Assembly. It was also suggested that the Assembly more quickly and effectively respond to political events and questions relating to international peace and security so as to assert its proper role in accordance with the Charter.

34. The wish that the reports of the Security Council be more analytical and that the Council submit special subject-oriented reports was also expressed. On the other hand, the preparation of the annual report of the Council had been improved thanks to the informal meetings held between the presidency and the wider United Nations membership in July of 2008, 2009 and 2010, and the institutionalization of those consultations was requested. In this context, one delegation emphasized the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2010/507) on the Council's working methods, and expressed great appreciation for the Council's report covering the period from 1 August 2009 to 31 July 2010.

35. Others argued that the mandate for an annual report from the Security Council was being implemented and noted that the monthly briefings on the Council's programme of work were rarely well attended by the wider membership. It was underlined by one delegation that each principal organ worked according to its own provisions, and that this was a fundamental constitutional question.

36. The value of regular meetings between the Presidents of the principal organs was widely recognized, and it was considered that the practice could be further improved. Such coordination should also extend to the agendas and programmes of work of the respective bodies and might have a formal agenda, with outcomes to be shared with Member States. Some delegations also noted the regular meetings that the President of the General Assembly had held with the President of the Human Rights Council and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission as a helpful practice and underlined the need for further coordination among all United Nations organs, bodies and groups.

37. The practice whereby the President of the General Assembly briefed the Assembly on his recent travels was appreciated as a valuable source of information.

38. It was suggested that the possibility of the further biennialization, triennialization and clustering of items could be looked into; on the other hand, opposition to the introduction of any type of sunset clause without the clear consent of the co-sponsoring States and/or the States concerned was reiterated.

39. The visibility of the General Assembly continued to be a matter of interest to many delegations. It was stressed that revitalization could be assured only when the Assembly took relevant action on issues of common concern to the international community, which would help increase the Assembly's visibility. On the question of an assistant to the Spokesperson, the need for the implementation of previous resolutions was emphasized.

40. Thematic debates were considered to be an important tool to facilitate more in-depth discussions on current issues of critical importance to the international community. On the other hand, while welcoming the holding of thematic debates generally, the holding and preparation of such debates in consultation with Member States was stressed. In an interactive exchange, the President stressed that the convening of thematic debates was one of the few tools in the hands of the President to help him provide impetus to the Assembly's deliberations, which was why he discouraged further limiting or circumscribing the President's authority to convene debates.

41. Regarding the relationship between the General Assembly and "other groups outside the United Nations", many delegations were of the view that the discussions should place a priority focus on the Assembly's relationship with the other principal

organs. Some speakers questioned the precise meaning of the term "other groups" in this context, and wondered whether it might include civil society or political groupings. The role of the Assembly as the only universal body was stressed. In this context, the outreach made by recent G-20 presidencies to associate with the Assembly in a spirit of accountability and transparency was welcomed by some delegations.

42. Many speakers again underlined the importance of implementing existing resolutions, and in this regard some suggested the need for a follow-up and monitoring mechanism. One delegation underlined that all pending provisions needed to be implemented within existing resources.

43. In their concluding remarks, the Co-Chairs expressed their gratitude for the President's presence, which had added to the meeting's productivity, and thanked delegations for their substantive comments.

Implementation of General Assembly resolutions and the agenda; working methods of the General Assembly and operational and technical issues, including information on the General Assembly voting system, in the framework of the capital master plan

44. The third meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group, which was its second thematic meeting, was held on 28 April. It focused on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions and the agenda, as well as on the Assembly's working methods and operational and technical issues, including balloting. The meeting consisted of an interactive first part, during which the Working Group heard several briefings and had an opportunity to engage in a question-and-answer session, and a second part, for general statements by delegations. A total of eight Member States took the floor during the first segment; six delegations, including on behalf of groups, participated in the second.

45. Following brief opening remarks by the Co-Chairs in which they explained the structure and envisaged interactive nature of the meeting, the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in his capacity as Chair of the Informal Working Group of the Security Council on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, opened the first segment with a briefing on lessons learned in the context of the work of that Working Group which might also be relevant in the context of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group. He focused his statement on the Council's experience in streamlining its summary statements of matters of which the Council was seized, in line with the guidelines contained in the note by the President of the Council (S/2010/507), noting that the number of items had been reduced from 144 at the beginning of 2007 to 88 at present. Specifically, this had been achieved through the consolidation of overlapping items; a yearly review to determine whether the Council had concluded its consideration of any of the items listed; the practice of a "sunset procedure"; and the use of umbrella agenda items.

46. In the second briefing to the Working Group, the Permanent Representative of Mongolia, in her capacity as Chair of the Second Committee at the sixty-fifth session, shared her experiences with regard to that Committee's deliberations and its consequent adoption of a decision on improving its working methods. Noting the work already undertaken by her predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea, she walked the Working Group through the various steps taken by the Second Committee in considering this issue during its session in 2010.

Emphasizing each Main Committee's particularities, she stressed that improving the working methods would benefit smaller delegations generally.

47. The third briefing was given by the Director of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, who spoke about the organizational aspects of high-level meetings of the General Assembly, especially those held in September. Noting the recent increase in the number of such meetings, and the priority, long emphasized by Member States, of preserving the sanctity of the general debate, the Director recalled a number of parameters regarding the planning of such high-level meetings.

48. The fourth and final briefing was given by the Director of the Meetings and Publishing Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, who made a PowerPoint presentation on documentation, in which he noted the various steps taken by the Department in recent years to enhance its documentation processes.

49. The briefings, and the initiative of Co-Chairs in having arranged them, were strongly welcomed by delegations, who took the opportunity to have an exchange of views. One speaker welcomed the briefing by the Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions of the Security Council as a useful exchange of experience. Another asked how Member States were involved in the streamlining exercise in the Council and how non-members of the Council could participate in discussions on items of interest to them. Another delegation welcomed the information from the Council, but suggested that the Council could learn something from the Assembly, rather than the other way around. Information was sought regarding the Council's use of umbrella items. In response to those points, the Chair of the Informal Working Group thanked delegations for their questions and comments and indicated his openness to further exchanges.[1]

50. In response to the briefing by the Chair of the Second Committee, it was underlined that, indeed, each Main Committee had its own working culture. The Chair was asked what circumstances she thought had facilitated the adoption of last year's decision. One delegation wondered whether the measures that had been adopted, the implementation of which ultimately required the goodwill of delegations, were sufficient; another speaker enquired as to the Chair's assessment concerning the follow-up to the decision taken. It was also noted that the Second Committee had done its duty in line with the request by the Ad Hoc Working Group to the Main Committees, but that others had not, and that, possibly through the good offices of the Co-Chairs, this could be relayed to the other Main Committee Chairs. The Chair of the Second Committee agreed that the measures taken were, indeed, a first step, and that as a way of moving forward she would share the lessons learned with her successor.

51. With regard to the briefing on the organization of high-level meetings, the issue of the establishment of the list of speakers was raised. The question was asked as to whether it could be reformed through the introduction of the method of

[1] Following the meeting, the Chair of the Informal Working Group of the Security Council on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, having noted the questions posed to him by delegations, forwarded written responses to the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group, who distributed them accordingly.

drawing lots, which would obviate the need for delegations to secure the best possible slot through bargaining and other means. The view was expressed that the number of high-level meetings should be minimized and that they should be spread throughout the calendar year. The Director of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division confirmed that the list of speakers for the 2010 High-level Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals had been prepared on the basis of a drawing of lots and that the pertinent modalities were set out in annex I to the relevant resolution (resolution 64/184).

52. In follow-up to the presentation given on documentation, delegations emphasized that the electronic dissemination of documents could not be relied upon exclusively, and that paper copies continued to exercise an important formal function. Another delegation, on the other hand, suggested that less information submitted in writing should be asked of the Secretariat, also with a view to global sustainability. The Director of the Meetings and Publishing Division, in response to those comments, took note of the need for the continuing distribution of hard copies, while assuring delegations that few organizations anywhere in the world operated in as environmentally friendly a manner as that employed by the United Nations.

53. Before moving on to the meeting's second segment, the Working Group was informed that, pursuant to paragraph 24 of resolution 60/286, the comments and past practices regarding the rules of procedure of the General Assembly had been made available online and could be accessed from the Assembly website.

54. Regarding the agenda, the strong belief was expressed that neither the biennialization, triennialization or elimination of agenda items, nor the introduction of a sunset clause, could be conducted without the clear consent of the co-sponsoring States and/or the States concerned. Another view stressed that it was fully appropriate to examine thoroughly the possibilities for the further streamlining of the agenda, including the consolidation of existing resolutions.

55. Regarding the implementation of resolutions, there was widespread agreement that existing resolutions needed to be adhered to and implemented. The fact that a large number of the provisions contained in resolutions adopted under the revitalization item had not been implemented could be taken as an indication that the process had generated a sufficient number of ideas. One delegation called for establishing a follow-up unit in the Office of the President of the General Assembly and suggested that the texts of resolutions should be shortened, which would have the result of ensuring greater political impact.

56. Particular importance was attached to considering ways of improving working methods. As year-long debates on the revitalization of the General Assembly had yielded only limited results, it was argued that the membership bore primary responsibility for ensuring that the Assembly fulfil its political functions, by making its debates meaningful and ensuring respect for its decisions. One delegation noted that the level of compliance with time limits for speeches in the Assembly was dismal.

57. Regarding the organization of high-level meetings, it was noted that they were held on the basis of mandates from the General Assembly and served to increase visibility of very important topics. The view was expressed, on the other hand, that the holding of too many high-level meetings could undermine the importance of such meetings, and it was suggested that they be spread over the course of the entire

year, rather than being concentrated around the general debate. It was also suggested that the Working Group elaborate indicative guidance in this regard at the current session.

58. On balloting, support was expressed for any technical improvement that would make the General Assembly more efficient and secure, while it was also noted that the systems proposed during previous sessions, and currently under consideration, did not appear to meet the requirements of reliability, credibility, integrity and confidentiality. The Working Group was informed that there had not been any new technological developments on this matter. It was also firmly underscored that the system currently in place could be changed only by a decision of the plenary, and that many delegations attached greatest importance to this particular matter. One delegation, however, suggested moving this issue to the Fifth Committee, since it had budgetary implications.

59. On documentation, the importance of introducing measures to improve the quality and accuracy of United Nations documents in the six official languages was stressed, to ensure that they were systematically produced and translated in a more cost-effective way using the texts and speeches as they were written or given in the original language and that more documents were issued on time. One delegation expressed the view that the United Nations could increase its visibility and impact by ensuring that its decisions were issued immediately after adoption.

60. In concluding remarks, the Co-Chairs expressed gratitude for Member States' participation and noted that the interactive format of the meeting had been an innovative way of focusing attention on the topics under discussion.

The role and responsibility of the General Assembly in the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General

61. The fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group, which was its third thematic meeting, was held on 17 May. It focused on the role and responsibility of the General Assembly in the process of selecting and appointing Secretaries-General of the United Nations and in the selection of other executive heads in the United Nations system organizations. A total of 15 speakers took the floor in the course of the meeting, a number of them representing groups.

62. In opening the meeting, the Co-Chairs noted that the subject matter of the meeting had been considered on a number of occasions and that resolutions had been adopted thereon. Article 97 of the Charter constituted the reference point for the membership, even though there were different interpretations concerning its provisions. Speakers were therefore invited to make specific comments in this regard. Noting the fact that these discussion were being broadened to include the heads of agencies, the Co-Chairs cited the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Selection and conditions of service of executive heads in the United Nations system organizations" (see A/65/71), suggesting that it could also serve as a reference point for the meeting.

63. Many Member States underlined that they considered the process of selecting the Secretaries-General to be one of the most important elements of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, with far-reaching consequences for the quality and relevance of the United Nations. It was stressed by many that the process of selection and appointment needed to be more transparent, credible, and

inclusive of all Member States, by making full use of the powers enshrined in the Charter, acknowledging also that the Assembly needed to play a more active, effective and efficient role in the matter. One speaker wondered whether new measures were required or whether Member States simply needed to make fuller use of already existing powers, while a number of others stressed that the non-implementation of existing provisions was due to the lack of political will.

64. Wide agreement emerged that existing resolutions needed to be implemented more fully, even though the membership disagreed as to which ones, with some pointing to resolutions 51/241, 60/286 and 64/301, and others including in that list resolution 11 (I), the earliest pertinent resolution on the appointment of the Secretary-General. Many described resolution 11 (I) as antiquated and outdated. One speaker went further, first pointedly noting that, pursuant to that resolution, only a man could be appointed Secretary-General, and then going on to posit that the resolution had undermined the notion that the Secretary-General was in essence accountable to the General Assembly, the sum total of the membership of the United Nations. Many speakers also expressed the view that the power the Security Council had gained in this matter over time could be attributed to a certain extent to the interpretation made of Article 97 of the Charter in the resolution.

65. By focusing on specific provisions of resolutions already adopted, specifically resolutions 51/241, 60/286 and 64/301, speakers throughout the meeting suggested the following actions and principles to achieve greater transparency and inclusiveness: the principles of geographical rotation and gender equality should be respected; the President of the General Assembly should consult with Member States in order to identify and endorse a set of candidates for the post of Secretary-General which would then be forwarded to the Security Council (furthermore, the Presidents of the Assembly and the Council could co-sign a letter inviting Member States to submit such candidatures); the formal presentation of candidates should be made to the Assembly to allow for effective and useful interaction with Member States before a final decision was taken; and a more specific timeline for the selection and appointment process should be developed.

66. While it was acknowledged that the above-mentioned measures could not be fully applicable immediately to the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General in the current year, a few delegations suggested that certain improvements in the process could be made during the current session. Such possible interim measures included preparing a slate (or panel) of candidates that could be forwarded to the Security Council and having candidates make formal presentations in and to the General Assembly or major groups within it, thus giving Member States an opportunity for an exchange of views with the candidates. This, it was argued, was a way for the Council and the Assembly to respect each others' mandates.

67. A number of references were made to a recently circulated proposal of the "Small Five" group of countries, which recommended measures to ensure broader participation of Member States in the process without prejudice to the prerogatives of the Security Council. With reference to the ongoing consultations in the context of the review of the Human Rights Council, where the suggestion had been made that prospective candidates present their voluntary pledges to the General Assembly, one speaker argued that the same standards should be applied to appointments to

key positions in the Secretariat, including the Secretary-General, a practice already in place in other international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization.

68. Another delegation, stressing that the Secretary-General was in equal part diplomat and administrator, felt strongly that the appointment of the Secretary-General should be made in an atmosphere of harmony and consensus, in cooperation between the Security Council and the General Assembly. In this context, it insisted, the provisions of Article 97 needed to be honoured.

69. Other speakers emphasized the need to respect the co-equal status of the principal organs of the United Nations and to ensure that they did not interfere in each others' working methods. They strongly advocated preserving the current practice in accordance with Article 97, while still favouring the opportunity for Member States to get to know candidates better through meetings with regional groups and other such measures. They agreed that it could also be useful for candidates to hear questions from Member States on such occasions, but otherwise supported the continuation of the current practice, which they felt had served and would continue to serve the Organization as a whole well.

70. Finally, some delegations noted that the role of the Secretary-General was unique and particular, owing to the role and powers conferred upon him by the Charter.

71. Regarding the second element of the discussion, the selection of other executive heads in the United Nations system organizations, the report of the Joint Inspection Unit was widely acknowledged, with frequent and specific references being made to the fact that it noted that conducting hearings/meetings with candidates running for the post of executive head of an organization of the United Nations common system could enhance the transparency and credibility of the selection process and make it more inclusive of all nationalities. One speaker supported in particular the following recommendations contained in the report: (a) that vacancy announcements be published widely; (b) that criteria, terms of reference, including required competencies, qualifications and experience be established; and (c) that rigorous criteria and procedures for screening candidates and for the interviews of such candidates be established, while acknowledging that some steps had already been taken in that direction. Other speakers welcomed the initiative of the Co-Chairs to introduce this new element to the debate under this item, with some specifically welcoming a careful consideration of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit with a view to ensuring transparency, legitimacy and balanced representation. Focusing on the report and on human resource issues more generally, another speaker underlined the provisions contained in resolution 65/248 D, as well as recommendation 6 of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, according to which the terms of office of executive heads should be limited to no more than two consecutive terms.

72. While the recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit were taken note of, it was also suggested that its objective was to assist in the establishment of harmonized selection criteria that would ensure the highest quality of leadership and management at the executive level, and the report's observation that the process of the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General was unique in comparison with that of other executive heads was also underscored in this regard.

Strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly

73. The fifth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group, which was its fourth thematic meeting, was held on 25 May. It focused on the Office of the President of the General Assembly, support to it, and its institutional memory. A total of 11 speakers, including representatives of groups, took the floor in the course of the meeting, which included presentations by the Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly on the work of the Office and by the Director of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council Affairs Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on the Trust Fund in support of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

74. The Chef de Cabinet began by framing his thoughts on strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly with two remarks: that the President and his Office considered it to be a major element of revitalization, and that they subscribed to the views of the President of the sixty-fourth session as indicated in the annex to the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group (A/64/903). He touched on the issue of the three-month transition period, saying that this was important for strengthening institutional memory and acknowledging that it facilitated establishing a solid working relationship with the Secretariat at an early stage. He nonetheless cautioned that incoming Presidents and their teams would need to be careful, as his team had been, not to undermine the efforts of the incumbent. He admitted that there had been some difficulties with the office space provided during the transition period. As regards staffing, he underscored the importance of taking over some staff from the previous presidency to optimize institutional memory, noting that five staff and one assistant (a full quarter of his team) had been retained by those means for that purpose. Turning to the budget, he stressed the degree to which it was important to find a good balance between the core resources coming from the United Nations budget and resources coming from Member States, through either the trust fund, secondments or voluntary contributions, noting that core resources were more predictable and ensured more independence. On protocol, he underscored that the situation and the support received remained wanting. On communications, while he expressed gratitude for the provision of the Office's Spokesperson and Webmaster, he was nevertheless clear that more could be done as regards reporting on the President's activities. In closing, he stressed that the discussion of these issues had been ongoing for some time, that recommendations and decisions had already been taken and that what was needed first and foremost was to follow through with implementation. Citing a recent initiative relating to the continuity of best practices, the Chef de Cabinet mentioned the "PGA Handbook", which, in accordance with operative paragraph 17 of resolution 64/301, was shortly to be distributed by Switzerland.

75. The Director of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council Affairs Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management spoke about the Trust Fund in support of the Office of the General Assembly, providing the status report requested by Member States. Recalling the establishment of the Trust Fund and the invitation to Member States to contribute to it contained in operative paragraph 12 of resolution 64/301, he announced that six Member States had contributed a total of $468,693.87 to the fund since its inception. Three contributions, totalling $70,133.87, had been made during the sixty-fourth session: one towards covering the costs of the thematic debate on disarmament, and

the other two towards covering those of the thematic debate on peacekeeping. The three remaining contributions, totalling $398,560, had been made by three Member States during the current session. Of this amount, $391,500 had been contributed by two Member States to cover the recruitment of two staff members in the Office of the President for the sixty-fifth session, with the remaining $7,060 having been contributed by one Member State towards covering the costs of thematic debates during the current session. The Director noted that, while the fund was handled by the Office of the Controller, it was administered by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

76. He then turned to the challenges involved in handling transitional office arrangements for incoming Presidents. He underscored that the relevant resolutions did not make any particular funding provisions for covering the costs of staff or space during the three-month period between the election of the President and the beginning of the presidency. In addition, as there was no approved funding for transitional office space, that had been difficult to arrange. The combination of all of those factors often made transitional arrangements very challenging.

77. The Director then outlined the substantive support provided to the Office of the President by the Secretariat. In closing, the Director re-emphasized that the Secretariat made every effort in its power to provide the fullest possible support to Presidents and their Offices throughout their tenure.

78. In response to the briefings, delegations raised a number of questions. One speaker focused on the issue of retaining institutional memory in the Office of the President, specifically mentioning both the information provided to the Office by the previous President during the transition period and the ongoing support it received from the Secretariat. Another speaker touched upon the Chef de Cabinet's comments on the budget and its adequacy, wondering whether the current amount was sufficient and seeking reconfirmation that the amount would indeed be reviewed in the context of the 2012-2013 budget. On budgetary and staffing support for protocol and, to a lesser extent, public information, the speaker pushed for more precision regarding needs that remained to be addressed. To the first questioner, the Chef de Cabinet responded that, as far as information on the status of ongoing issues and developments was concerned, the relationship with the incumbent was crucial. He underscored, however, the importance of the Secretariat throughout the transition process. In response to the second question, he admitted that the core budget should be considered a strict minimum and acknowledged the need to balance it with voluntary contributions. He acknowledged the problems with protocol and expressed the hope that a dedicated post for the purpose of providing the support needed could be discussed in the context of the 2012-2013 budget. He did not, however, see any specific financial problem with regard to public information, and again expressed appreciation for the work of the President's Spokesperson.

79. Another delegation expressed concern at the space constraints facing the Office of the President that the Chef de Cabinet had described, and shared with the concerns that had been expressed about the implications of the budget situation. The speaker wanted to know whether, given the small fraction of costs and needs covered by the regular/core budget, this situation meant that countries without money or friends should not put themselves forward to serve as President of the General Assembly. In response to the first of those questions, the Chef de Cabinet highlighted that he had been speaking about the initial transitional office space that

had been provided, not about the Office's permanent quarters, indicating that the latter had been adequate. Focusing on the questioner's second point, he acknowledged that the core budget indeed covered only a small proportion of the financial needs of the Office and that significant contributions were required to cover the remainder. He allowed that this situation might pose a problem for countries with fewer resources or less influence, admitting that the help and support of other countries was important. He insisted, however, that countries in this position should have help, and encouraged other countries' generosity in that regard.

80. It was noted that many expenses were taken in charge by the country of origin of the President, thus placing an extra burden on many countries with limited resources, which could not afford such means, and creating the risk of inequality of Member States when considering candidatures for the post of President. In this context, the Secretariat was requested to provide the Working Group with a more detailed analysis and evaluation of the implementation of the provisions of the General Assembly, including resolutions 59/313, 60/286 and 64/301. In the same vein, a request was made for the assignment of additional posts on a permanent basis, the allocation of adequate space in the current North Lawn Building and, in particular, the renovated permanent Headquarters, and an increase in the regular budget allocated to the Office of the President in order to match at least the evolution of the general budget of the Organization.

81. On enhancing the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, it was underlined that ensuring efficiency was necessary not only in the process of nominating and selecting the President, but also in the smooth transfer of responsibility. The importance of the periodic meetings between the Presidents was noted in this regard, and it was suggested that information provided by the President to Member States on substantial issues raised during such meetings would further enhance transparency and ensure better coordination. Regarding the briefings provided by outgoing Presidents to their successors, the President was encouraged to share his views and recommendations with the Working Group as well.

82. One speaker suggested a number of possible steps to further strengthen the role of the President of the General Assembly, including having the President take initiatives and decisions on holding formal or informal meetings to discuss issues of particular interest to Member States; request briefings by the Secretariat on issues pertaining to the mandates of the Assembly, including on peace and security; convene press conferences to highlight particular issues discussed by the Assembly or decisions adopted; perform the role of the Spokesperson for the entire membership on all issues on the Assembly's agenda; organize debates in the Assembly on the reports of the Security Council, noting actions suggested by the Member States, and inform the President of the Council about both; convene regular meetings with the heads of other principal organs and report thereon to the General Assembly; be briefed regularly by the President of the Security Council on the work of the Council, and then inform Member States about the substance of those meetings; engage in fortnightly discussions with the Secretary-General on various activities under way in the United Nations, including on the work of the Council, and brief the Assembly thereon; and be consulted by the Secretary-General on all major appointments, including the appointments of panel members and advisers.

83. This speaker also felt strongly that it was very important that the President's outreach capacity, including through participation in regional meetings, be further enhanced, acknowledging that participation in regional meetings would require the provision of additional resources. The speaker also reiterated the idea of using a "troika" of past, present and future Presidents of the General Assembly to ensure better transitional arrangements.

84. On the budget, while some called for augmenting resources and added that a sustainable system for the Trust Fund needed to be found, others emphasized that these questions should be examined during the sixty-sixth session in the context of the 2012-2013 budget and that the appropriate avenue of consideration would be the Advisory Committee for Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee. They also suggested, in this context, that the option of relying more heavily on the resources and support of the Secretariat, as the Security Council did with the Security Council Affairs Division of the Department of Political Affairs, should be considered. Other speakers questioned the value of the Office of the President being financed under different formulas and under the budgets of different parts of the Secretariat, and wondered whether it might not be preferable to harmonize and unify the Office's funding structure. The Secretary responded that, as the Office was being serviced by a number of departments, its costs were borne by and budgeted under the sector and department concerned.

85. On transitional arrangements, one speaker made two very concrete suggestions: that the report on lessons learned provided by the outgoing Presidents first be given to their successors at the moment of election, with an updated version given at the end of the session; and that the Office of the President be equipped with a solid computerized documentation and archiving system that would facilitate the maintenance of files and information across sessions.

86. On staffing, one delegation strongly emphasized the importance of a group of core advisers being retained within the Office of the President, and asked the Chef de Cabinet to indicate how many staff, at a minimum, should be kept over from one session to the next. The Chef de Cabinet responded that the group of five that they had kept had worked well, and credited the support received from the Secretariat.

III. Conclusions

87. In accordance with its mandate, the Ad Hoc Working Group endeavoured to identify key issues of concern and possible consensus, to examine the current status of implementation of those issues, and either to take or to indicate possible further action to be taken on them.

88. At its sixth meeting, on 29 July 2011, the Ad Hoc Working Group considered and adopted a draft resolution (see para. 90 below) and the present report.

IV. Recommendations

89. On the basis of a draft resolution circulated by the Co-Chairs, the Ad Hoc Working Group developed the resolution set out below.

90. At its sixth meeting, on 29 July 2011, the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly concluded its work for the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The Working Group decided to recommend that the General Assembly adopt the following draft resolution:

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its previous resolutions relating to the revitalization of its work, including resolutions 46/77 of 12 December 1991, 47/233 of 17 August 1993, 48/264 of 29 July 1994, 51/241 of 31 July 1997, 52/163 of 15 December 1997, 55/14 of 3 November 2000, 55/285 of 7 September 2001, 56/509 of 8 July 2002, 57/300 of 20 December 2002, 57/301 of 13 March 2003, 58/126 of 19 December 2003, 58/316 of 1 July 2004, 59/313 of 12 September 2005, 60/286 of 8 September 2006, 61/292 of 2 August 2007, 62/276 of 15 September 2008, 63/309 of 14 September 2009 and 64/301 of 13 September 2010,

Stressing the importance of the implementation of resolutions of the General Assembly on the revitalization of its work, and *noting* with concern the lack of their implementation and impact on the authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly,

Recognizing the role of the General Assembly in addressing issues of peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations,

Reaffirming the role and authority of the General Assembly on global matters of concern to the international community, including global governance, as set out in the Charter,

Welcoming the decision by the President of the General Assembly to designate "Reaffirming the central role of the United Nations in global governance" as the theme of the general debate of the sixty-fifth session,

Recognizing the need to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly,

Noting the important role and the activities of the Office of the President of the General Assembly,

Reiterating that the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly is a critical component of the overall reform of the United Nations,

1. *Welcomes* the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly;[1]

[1] A/65/909.

2. *Decides* to establish, at its sixty-sixth session, an ad hoc working group on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, open to all Member States:

(*a*) To identify further ways to enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the Assembly, inter alia, by building on previous resolutions and evaluating the status of their implementation;

(*b*) To submit a report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session;

3. *Also decides* that the Ad Hoc Working Group shall continue its review of the inventory of General Assembly resolutions on revitalization based on the updated annex to the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group submitted at the sixty-third session,[2] and requests the Secretary-General to submit an update on the provisions of the General Assembly resolutions on revitalization addressed to the Secretariat for implementation that have not been implemented, with an indication of the constraints and reasons behind any lack of implementation, for further consideration by the Ad Hoc Working Group at the sixty-sixth session;

Role and authority of the General Assembly

4. *Reaffirms* the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on questions relating to international peace and security, in accordance with Articles 10 to 14 and 35 of the Charter of the United Nations, where appropriate, using the procedures set forth in rules 7 to 10 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which enable swift and urgent action by the Assembly, bearing in mind that the Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter;

5. *Stresses* the need for the General Assembly to actively undertake its role and effectively respond, in a timely manner, to emerging challenges and current events of common concern to the international community;

6. *Welcomes* the holding of thematic debates on current issues of critical importance to the international community and their interactive inclusive character, and invites the President of the General Assembly to continue this practice and to consult with Member States on the possibilities for achieving, where appropriate, results-oriented outcomes in such debates;

7. *Recognizes* the importance and benefit of a continuing interaction between the General Assembly and international or regional forums and organizations dealing with global matters of concern to the international community in the perspective of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly;

8. *Welcomes* the continued practice of the periodic informal briefings by the Secretary-General on his priorities, travels and most recent activities, including his participation in international meetings and events organized outside the United Nations, and encourages him to continue with this practice;

9. *Stresses* the importance of ensuring increased cooperation, coordination and exchange of information among the principal organs, and welcomes the holding of regular meetings of the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session with the Secretary-General and the Presidents of the Security Council and

[2] A/63/959.

the Economic and Social Council, as well as with the Chairs of subsidiary bodies, and briefings to Member States on the outcomes of these meetings on a regular basis, and encourages the continuation of such practice;

10. *Welcomes* the improvements that have been made in the quality of the annual reports of the Security Council to the General Assembly, encourages the Council to make further improvements as necessary, and takes note of the holding of informal meetings of the President of the Council with all Member States before the preparation of the report;

11. *Notes* that, in accordance with Article 15 and Article 24, paragraph 3, of the Charter, the Security Council shall submit to the General Assembly an annual report and, when necessary, special reports for its consideration;

12. *Recognizes* that non-implementation of various General Assembly resolutions, in particular those adopted by consensus, may diminish the role and authority of the General Assembly, and underlines the important role and responsibility of Member States in their implementation;

Working methods

13. *Welcomes* the substantial discussion undertaken and the decision adopted by the Second Committee of the General Assembly at the sixty-fifth session aimed at rationalizing and streamlining its agenda and improving its working methods;

14. *Requests* that the General Assembly and its Main Committees, at the sixty-sixth session, in consultation with Member States, continue consideration of and make proposals for the further biennialization, triennialization, clustering and elimination of items on the agenda of the Assembly, taking into account the relevant recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group, including through the introduction of a sunset clause, with the clear consent of the sponsoring State or States;

15. *Encourages* each Main Committee to discuss its working methods at the sixty-sixth session, and invites the Chairs of the Main Committees, at the sixty-sixth session, to brief the Ad Hoc Working Group, as appropriate, on the discussions on the working methods;

16. *Notes* with appreciation that the high-level meetings held at the United Nations give more visibility to very important topics, while mindful of the need to facilitate full participation of all Member States and to preserve the integrity of the general debate in September, and invites the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the Chairs of the Main Committees, in consultation with Member States, to enhance the coordination of the scheduling of high-level meetings with a view to optimizing the number and distribution of such events;

17. *Encourages* Member States, United Nations bodies and the Secretariat to consult on the consolidation of documentation in order to avoid duplication of work and to exercise the fullest possible discipline in striving for concise resolutions, reports and other documentation, inter alia, by referring to previous documents rather than repeating actual content;

18. *Stresses* the importance of further enhancing public and media awareness of the work and decisions of the General Assembly, including through their timely issuance and distribution in all official languages;

19. *Decides* that the Ad Hoc Working Group shall remain apprised of options for more time-effective, efficient and secure balloting, reiterating the need to ascertain the credibility, reliability and confidentiality of the balloting process, and requests the Secretariat to submit an update in case of any new technological developments, on the understanding that the adoption of any new balloting system in the future will require a decision of the plenary of the General Assembly;

Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads

20. *Reaffirms* its commitment to continue, in the Ad Hoc Working Group, in accordance with the provisions of Article 97 of the Charter, its consideration of the revitalization of the role of the General Assembly in the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General, and calls for the full implementation of all relevant resolutions, including resolutions 11 (I) of 24 January 1946, 51/241, 60/286, in particular paragraphs 17 to 22 of the annex thereto, and 64/301;

21. *Takes note* of the recommendation contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Selection and conditions of service of executive heads in the United Nations system organizations"[3] proposing that the General Assembly conduct hearings or meetings with candidates running for the post of Secretary-General of the United Nations;

22. *Recognizes* that the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General differs from the process used with regard to other executive heads in the United Nations system, given the role of the Security Council in accordance with Article 97 of the Charter, and re-emphasizes the need for the process of selection of the Secretary-General to be transparent and inclusive of all Member States;

Strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly

23. *Welcomes* the views by the President of the General Assembly expressed to the Ad Hoc Working Group on the strengthening of the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly and its relationship with the Secretariat;

24. *Also welcomes* the periodic briefings by the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session to Member States on his recent activities, including official travels, and encourages the continuation of such practice;

25. *Notes* that the activities of the President of the General Assembly have increased markedly in recent years, recalls provisions regarding support for the Office of the President of the General Assembly in previous resolutions, expresses continued interest in seeking ways to further support the Office, in accordance with existing procedures, in particular rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, and in this context looks forward to the submission by the Secretary-General of his proposals pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 64/301;

26. *Requests* the Secretary-General, at the sixty-sixth session, to report on the funding and staffing of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, including on any technical, logistical, protocol-related or financial questions;

[3] See A/65/71.

27. *Notes* the concerns raised on the protocol arrangements in place for the President of the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to further endeavour to ensure, within agreed resources, that the President is provided with proper protocol and security services and adequate office space, with a view to enabling the President to carry out his or her functions in a manner commensurate with the dignity and stature of the Office;

28. *Emphasizes* the need to ensure, within agreed resources, that the Office of the President of the General Assembly is allocated dedicated staff within the Secretariat with responsibility for coordinating the transition between Presidents, managing interactions between the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, and the retention of institutional memory, and requests the outgoing Presidents of the Assembly to brief their successors on the lessons learned and best practices;

29. *Notes with appreciation* the contributions of Member States to the Trust Fund in support of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and invites Member States to continue to contribute to the Fund.